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ABSTRACT

Number 17 in Series I of the final report of the National Study of American Indian Education describes the small community of Sells, Arizona, in terms of (1) location and climate, (2) sociocultural background, (3) transportation problems, (4) housing problems, (5) governmental influence, (6) recreation, (7) educational opportunities, and (8) recent changes. Sells is a predominately Indian town located in southwest Arizona. Governmental agencies (e.g., Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Public Health Service, and Office of Economic Opportunity) provide jobs, as do the cattle industry and some distant mining operations. The town is the central gathering place of the Papago Indian tribe. The predominance of outdoor sanitation facilities is attributed to a critical shortage of water which must be hauled by truck. Housing is characteristically of adobe construction and small in size, but house trailers have been moved into the area recently. The educational environment includes (1) bussing of children from distant villages, (2) a central school district (Indian Oasis School District #40), (3) a high school and an elementary school serving a population of 779 students, and (4) a 3-man elected school board. Recently, a new high school has been proposed. Additionally, Sells has 5 churches, one of which operates a school. The report contains 1 map and a table. (AL)

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The National Study of American Indian Education

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Final Report

Community Background Reports

Series I

No. 17

PAPAGO RESERVATION

Sells, Arizona

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January, 1970

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NATIONAL STUDY OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

The attached paper is one of a number which make up the Final Report of the National Study of American Indian Education.

This Study was conducted in 1968-69-70 with the aid of a grant from the United States Office of Education, OEC-0-8-080147-2805.

The Final Report consists of five Series of Papers:

I. Community Backgrounds of Education in the Communities Which Have Been Studied.

II. The Education of Indians in Urban Centers.

III. Assorted Papers on Indian Education--mainly technical papers of a research nature.

IV. The Education of American Indians--Substantive Papers.

V. A Survey of the Education of American Indians.

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S E L L S

Location and Climate

Stretching for over a hundred miles to the west of Tucson, Arizona, is a sparse and arid desert area. Crossed by washes or arroyos, this region of elevated valley floors is surprisingly rich in vegetation--cholla cactus, creosote, saltbush, mesquite; and the foothills and mountain ranges ever in the eye support colorful shrubs, oak, and scrub pine.

The people, known today as the Papago, have for centuries lived on this land, raising livestock, farming the small fields of beans, squash and corn, and making rich use of the desert plants and their fruits. Now organized into the Papago Tribe of Arizona, they live mainly on the Papago Reservation, established in 1917, an area roughly sixty-five miles square lying along the southern border of Arizona between the Baboquivari Mountains in the east and the Ajo Mountains on the west, with an irregular line south of the Gila River as its northern boundary.

In the southeastern portion of this region, surrounded by vast stretches of open range land, with the Baboquivari Mountains to the south, is the community of Sells. Sells is the seat of Indian Oasis School District #40 which serves the Sells District of the reservation, and includes two of the schools in our Study--the Indian Oasis Elementary and High School, and the Topawa Elementary school.

The community of Sells is bordered entirely with hills to the south, and the north and west areas are flat lands. A small landing strip is located to the northwest of the community for small planes. There are no farm lands or forests of any kind in or around Sells. All of the areas around Sells are considered as open range for livestock.

There is a large wash or arroyo that comes in on the northwest portion of the community and a small one that comes in from the eastern end and combines to become the large wash. During the rainy seasons the water flows in from the east to the west.

There are no mines located within the immediate area of Sells.

Description of Sells

The typical residential pattern on the Papago reservation is one of scattered villages consisting of groups of related families living in earth-colored houses, or, in some places, single families living on isolated ranches. The community of Sells is different in that it is primarily a seat of federal, tribal, and state government, as well as mission and school activity.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs maintains its headquarters for the region here as does the U.S. Public Health Service which is located at the west end of the community near Highway 86. The State of Arizona has located a branch of the State Employment Agency in Sells, staffed by Papagos, to aid persons seeking off-reservation employment, largely in seasonal farm work.

In addition, the Papago Tribal Center is housed in a building in the center of the Sells business district. Here are the offices of the tribal chairman and other officers, and the various offices of Economic Opportunity Programs, administered by the tribe, including NYC (Neighborhood Youth Corps), CAP (Community Action Program), as well as legal services. Trailers augment the housing facilities of these services.

A trailer office also houses extension programs provided by the University of Arizona. Help in regard to livestock care, home economics and instruction in the preparation of surplus food commodities is given.

Missionary activity has taken place on the reservation since the first Jesuit missionary, Father Kino, arrived in 1698. At present in Sells there are five churches--the Nazarene Church located at the east end of town, the Assembly of God Church, located south of Highway 86 to the Northeast, the Roman Catholic Church in the Southeast section, the Presbyterian Church in the Southwest, and the Southern Baptist Church at the extreme west.

Because of the large number of activities centered there, Sells has attracted a large Indian and white population. Many service industries have arisen as a result: the Texaco Service Station and small cafe on Highway 86; the Chevron Service Station; two trading posts--the Indian Oasis Trading Post and the Papago Trading Store and cafe; the Garcia Store; and the Sells Beauty Shop.

Transportation

There are no commercial bus lines going through Sells or any part of the reservation. A few people hitch-hike to Tucson if their getting to town is urgent enough and if they don't have the finances to ask someone with vehicles to take them.

Some Papagos have their own transportation, purchased from the used car lots in Tucson or Casa Grande. Very few of the Papagos within the Sells area buy new cars but some of those with steady employment do buy new pickup trucks.

Papagos without transportation usually ask those with vehicles to take them to their destinations and back home but pay or furnish gas and oil or both.

Economy

The economy of Sells is based on employment within the different departments of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Public Health Service, the Tribal OEO programs, the Indian Oasis School, the Papago Tribal office, and the stores, cafes, and service stations which have arisen to provide services.

In the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the administrative personnel and heads of the different departments are made up of non-Indian and Indian alike. The Public Health Service also employs Indians in senior positions since there are some Indians who have had training to do some of the administrative work. Some have seniority and have taken over positions of responsibility.

In addition, there are several men employed on Kitt Peak as heavy equipment operators, maintenance men, and electrician helpers who commute back and forth every working day.

There are also some men who commute daily from here to the A.S. & R. Mining Company south of San Xavier reservation about 75 miles to the east.

The Papago Tribe employs clerk-typists, maintenance men for plumbing electrical and other work. Also, repairmen to maintain both domestic and livestock wells on the reservation are employed.

The PHS employs 28 Papagos permanently and 3 temporarily, as well as 10 Indians from other tribes. The non-Indians consist of 18 permanent employees, one temporary, and 9 commissioned officers--all at Sells.

A Tribal Work Experience Program is administered by the Social Services and Welfare Department of the BIA. Federal Government Assistance, to give training to unemployed men and women, provides training slots in the Housing Department, Roads Department, PHS, and as clerk typists for the different offices in the Papago agency and for the Papago Tribe. There are 155 training slots open for the whole Papago Reservation and about 47 people are in this program within the Sells area.

Steady employment is no guarantee of adequate incomes for Papago families in this area. The Public Welfare Department of Pima County does have different types of assistance for those with inadequate income. Aid to dependent children or aid to needy and blind which supplements the meager income of some families are examples.

There is very little migration of Papagos from Sells itself, though some migration does take place among the people who live in the school district. This is mainly for seasonal work in farming areas all the way to Yuma, Arizona, and on farming areas adjacent to the reservation. Recruiting for out of state seasonal harvesting work is done by the Arizona State Employment Office.

Housing

The employees of the Public Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs live in modern homes and apartments within the two compounds with well-kept lawns and trees or hedges and flower beds. The Papagos employed by these two agencies have their own homes made of adobe or frame houses. Most of the homes are not large enough to comfortably house the large Papago families.

Because of housing patterns, the non-Indians are segregated, living largely within the two compounds of the BIA and PHS.

Mobile trailer homes have recently been acquired by Papagos, but the adobe homes are more common still. Very few of the homes east of the BIA compound have running water. Water is hauled by trucks. People who do not have the cars or pickups, ask other people to haul water for them.

When electricity was brought into the reservation many of the villages were served and this led to the purchase of television sets. Several of the merchants from Tucson have been on the reservation peddling electrical appliances. Many of the families budget themselves very tightly to be able to buy television and record players.

The lack of water prevents having modern bathrooms and facilities. Because of this, out-houses are seen at nearly every home outside of the two compounds.

Government

Several different governing agencies operate in Sells. The Federal Government is represented by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Public Health Service. The State of Arizona is represented through the public school system and employment agencies. In addition, the Papago Tribal Office is located in Sells. Also, the Sells District Council, which consists of about fourteen people--six of these from Sells itself--is the governing body of the whole community.

The five different church denominations also maintain influence within this varied community.

There is a good relationship between the Papago Tribal Council, the Sells District Council, and the school.

Recreation

Children have more opportunity for racially integrated activities than do the adults. There are two integrated schools for kindergarten youngsters--one operated by the Southern Baptist Church, and the other run by the Papago Tribal OEO program, both encouraging children to play together during the school hours.

Since there are no other playgrounds but at the school, the smaller children play around their homes and also with neighbors. However, the school playground is open to the community at all times. Most of the parents try to keep their children near their homes where there is not much traffic to endanger the children. Nearly every home has spacious yards and open areas which can be used for play.

Boys of junior age (8-12) gather together in groups near their homes to play football or softball. Junior age girls visit and play near their homes. For the teenagers there is more to do. There is an integrated teenage club which has been active. Some of the public school teachers are working with these children, and parents help as chaperons on trips or at teenage dances. Parents also participate in fund sales for teenage activities.

There are rodeo grounds and baseball fields in the community. The school grounds also contain volleyball and basketball courts open to Sells.

Some of the events that take place in Sells have become annual affairs. In the spring, a junior rodeo is sponsored by the students from the Indian Oasis School. Everything is planned by them with the assistance of some of the members of the Papago Rodeo Committee. Participation in their rodeo is open to anyone that falls within the age limit that is determined by the junior rodeo committee.

On July the fourth, there is a tribal-sponsored pageant during which young women compete to become Miss Rodeo and Miss Papago. The winner reigns for a year. This contest is open to any unmarried, young Papago lady between the ages of 18 to 25 with one-half or more Papago ancestry.

The Papago Indian Rodeo and Fair takes place in October during the latter part of the month. This event also sponsors a pageant to select a Rodeo Queen. Last year (1968) a high school student from the Indian Oasis School won the honors and became the Rodeo Queen. This gave her the opportunity to represent the Papago Rodeo Board on other reservations in their pageantry parades.

Cordle Hall, which is part of the public school plant, is used as a gymnasium by both the school and the community. Community meetings and events are also held in the auditorium of the large Papago Tribe building. The various churches also have meeting space.

Recent Developments

Much of the change to be observed in Sells is related to the expansion of various government services.

The Papago Tribe, since their participation in the OEO programs under the Poverty Bill, has acquired three large trailers to house the Community Development Program, the Legal Service, and the director of the Papago tribe OEO departments. The extension department under the University of Arizona, has placed a trailer office near the Papago people, by their request, for help concerning livestock or assistance with home economics, such as instruction in the preparation of surplus commodity foods.

The Southern Baptists have built a home and have set up a staff to take care of the boys and girls placed there by the Social and Welfare Department of the BIA.

Additional homes have been built by the PHS for their staff, as well as additional offices for their field nurses, helpers, and interpreters. Another wing has been added to the main hospital building to serve for storage of supplies, and offices.

In the past three years, the BIA has had about twenty miles of road paved south of Sells, but the need for improved roads in other areas remains great.

Some of the Papago people have turned to buying mobile homes rather than to build homes out of adobe or other material. Within the past three years more trailer homes have been brought into the community. The public school has, because of the lack of space, leased about eleven mobile homes for the teachers. The BIA has, in the past year, added to the former school building; the classrooms were converted into offices; and the new addition used to house the whole BIA personnel. Three office buildings have been vacated by the BIA and presented to the Papago Tribal Council.

Because of the increased interest in hiring Papago men for contract work in farming areas within the state of Arizona, the State Employment Office has located a branch office in Sells. This has made it possible for interested parties to check on employment without, as in the past, having to go all the way to Tucson. One success of the move made by the Arizona State Employment Service is that they have trained and employed Papago men to staff the office in Sells.

E D U C A T I O N

It is to this busy center of administrative activity in the desert that school buses converge daily bringing children from outlying villages to the Indian Oasis School in Sells.

From the area to the south children are brought from New Fields (30 miles), San Miguel (24 miles), Choulic (21 miles), Cold Fields (20 miles), Komelic (16 miles), Vamori (19 miles) and Topawa (8 miles). (Map 1) From the west come high school students from Santa Rosa (35 miles) and Covered Wells (23 miles). From the Northeast come children from Comobabi (20 miles), Crowhang (17 miles) and some from the distant village of Santa Rosa Ranch. Although some children from Topawa come to Sells, children from other villages get off the buses to attend the school in Topawa.

The Indian Oasis School District #40 is the public school district serving the surrounding area. In 1968-69 it maintained the Indian Oasis School consisting of an elementary school and high school grades, and the elementary school in Topawa serving grades 1-8. A total of 779 pupils about equally divided among boys and girls were in attendance. (See Appendix)

The only other schools in Sells are the Southern Baptist Church and the tribal OEO program (Headstart) for kindergarten age children. The responsibility of the public schools for education of Papago children in the area is recent. The BIA School was consolidated with the public school in 1953, the BIA maintaining administrative control until it withdrew completely in 1963.

The Indian Oasis School is still located within the BIA compound, but new buildings have been erected including Cordle Hall, used as both a school and community meeting hall, gymnasium, and cafeteria.

The School District is supervised by a 3-member (to be 5 in 1970) elected School Board--members serving 3 year terms, with one new member elected annually by registered voters of the School District. Any registered voter who submits a petition with signatures of 10 percent of the previous year's voters may run for election. School Board meetings are held twice monthly. They are open and parents are invited to attend.

The School Board takes an active role in hiring personnel, including the Superintendent of Schools, and takes responsibility for establishing school policies.

Since becoming a public system, independent of the BIA, Indian Oasis School District #40 has dealt with several important issues. It has appointed a superintendent of its own choosing, arranged for a system of transportation for pupils and parents, it has conferred with various villages in arranging for the incorporation of St. Anthony's Mission School in Topawa into the public system, and it has responded to growing concern about education in the district. In 1964 only four Papagos were in college; within three years since then 20 Papagos have entered junior colleges and universities, and there is hope that more Papagos will receive the education needed to assist in the new programs on the reservation.

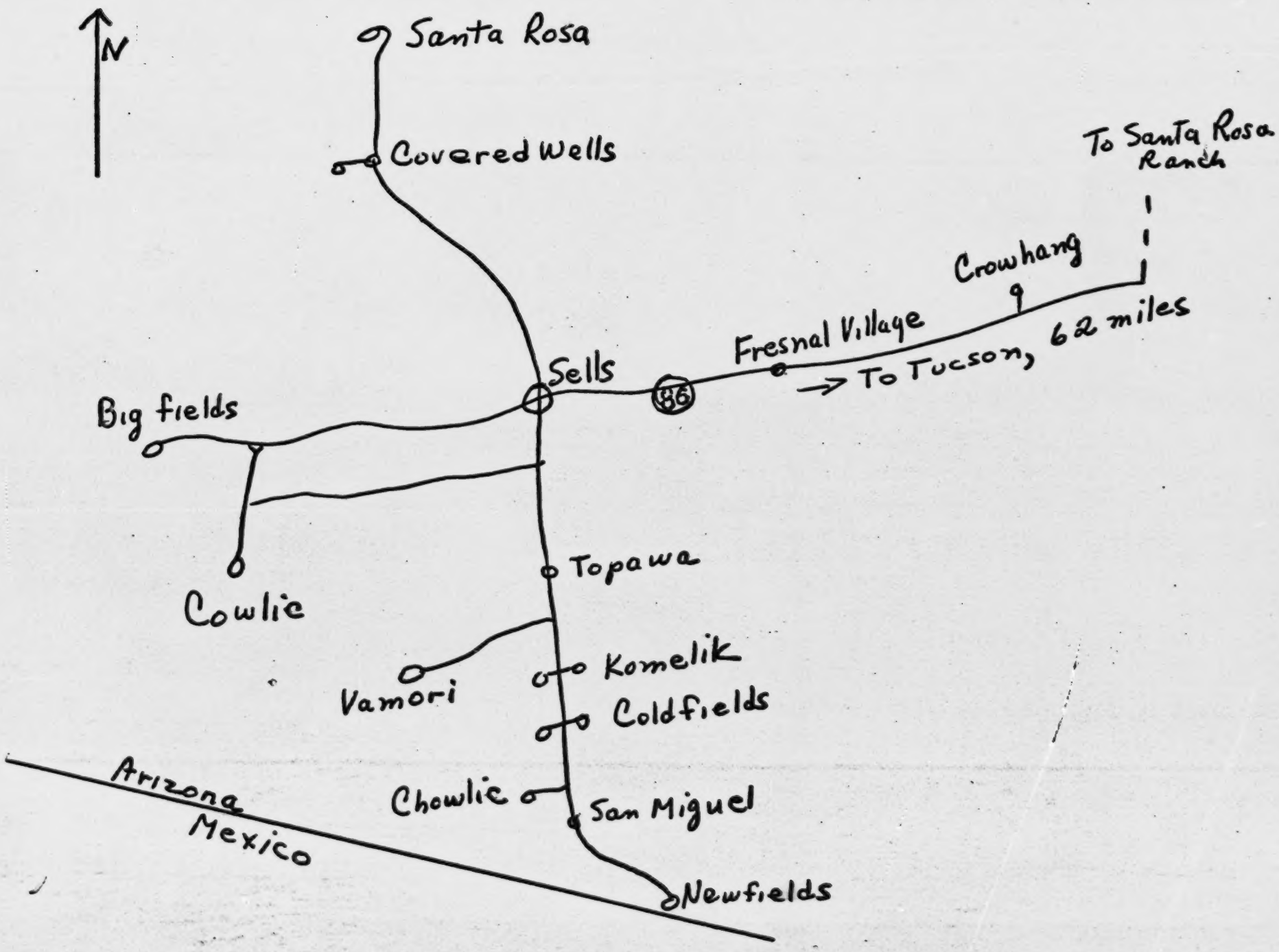
Currently the school board is working on plans to build a new high school east of Sells. The Sells District Council has allotted 50 acres of land for the purpose; and federal funds of $780,000 have been appropriated. However, the availability of water is a problem, and drilling for well water will commence soon although it is uncertain whether water can be found here.

Use of the school as a community center is encouraged and when open house is held, the school buses are used to furnish transportation from the outlying districts.

A Parent Teacher Council meets monthly for discussions on school affairs. This organization tries to inform the parents of their responsibilities to the school and encourages parental involvement with school problems. Many different projects have been undertaken by the members, such as volunteering to help in the different programs of the school, providing materials for curtains for the windows, and sewing uniforms. Problems that they wish brought to the attention of the school board are reported through someone delegated by the group.

Anyone can become a member of the PTC. However, a fee is set at fifty cents per person for the whole school year to help provide for refreshments and other needs. People can voice their opinions in the meetings held even if they have not paid their dues.

Current issues involve the building of the new high school and the improvement of educational achievement for Papago youth. There is discussion about the possible expansion of public education to include the entire Papago Reservation. However, parents are divided in their support of BIA, mission, and public schools.



MAP I SELLS - TOPAWA

Appendix

INDIAN OASIS SCHOOL-AGE SURVEY

(Topawa included)

Grade	Age	Boys	Girls	Total
1	6 yrs.-81	39	42	81
2	6 yrs.-2 7 yrs.-80	37	45	82
3	7 yrs.-5 8 yrs. -76	35	46	81
4	8 yrs.-3 9 yrs.-80	47	36	83
5	9 yrs.-2 10 yrs.-72	37	37	74
6	10 yrs.-7 11 yrs.-65 12 yrs.-4	47	29	76
7	12 yrs.-60 13 yrs.-32	36	56	92
8	12 yrs.-4 13 yrs.-31 14 yrs.-47 15 yrs.-1	43	40	83
9	13 yrs.-1 14 yrs.-24 15 yrs.-22 16 yrs.-10	22	32	54
10	14 yrs.-2 15 yrs.-18 16 yrs.-10 17 yrs.-6 18 yrs.-3 19 yrs.-1	24	16	40
11	16 yrs.-10 17 yrs.-10 18 yrs.-9 19 yrs.-2 20 yrs.-2	20	13	33
TOTALS		387	392	779